

melancholia



by Mia Rolph and Louisa Mascuch

The background of the page is decorated with several dried, pressed flowers in shades of cream and light brown. The flowers have delicate, papery petals and prominent, thin stamens. A small metal paperclip is visible on the left side, holding the central text box in place.

part I:

TREES, BODIES, AND
OTHER THINGS YOU
PLANT IN THE GROUND

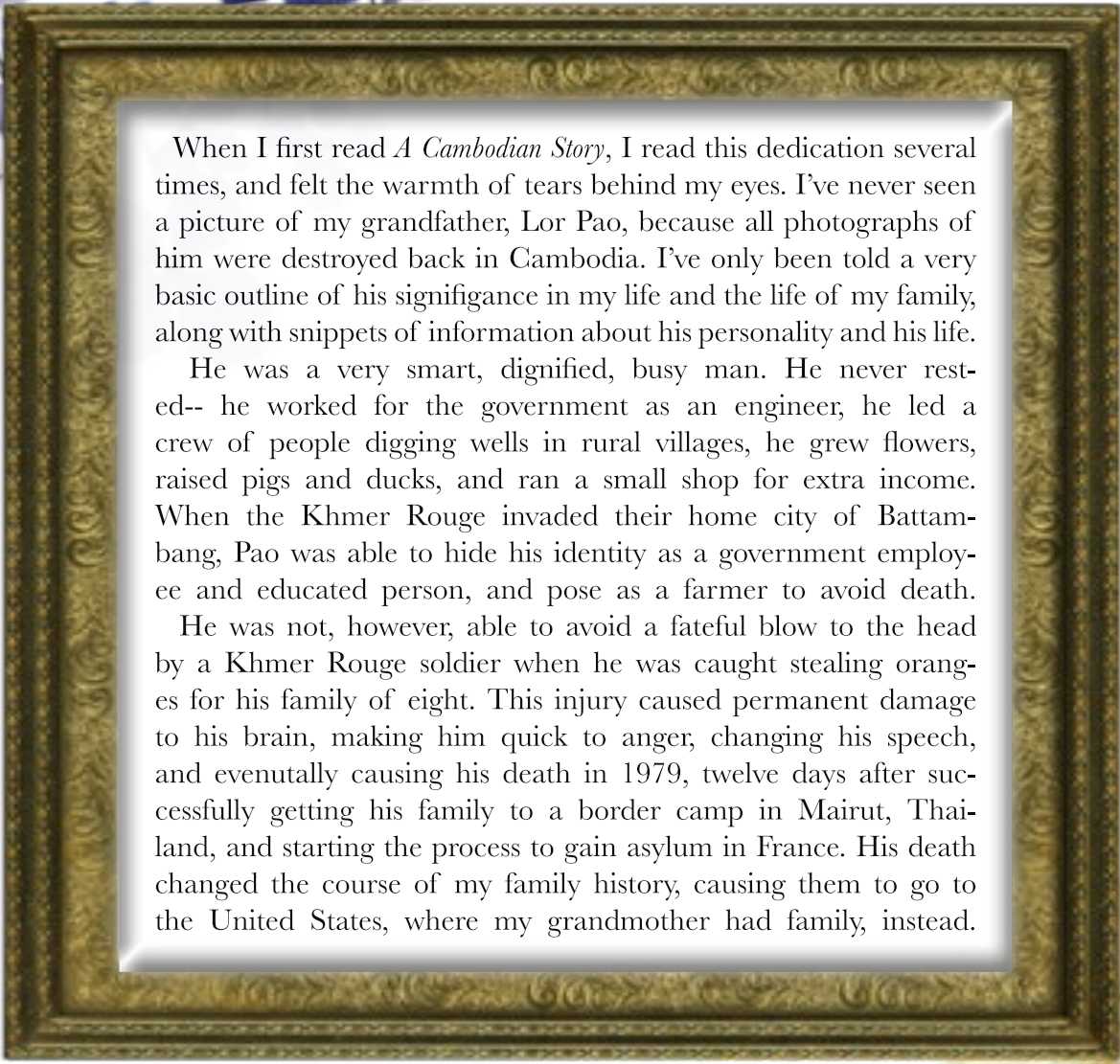
by Mia Rolph



The Lor and Chut family
would like to dedicate this history to
Lor Pao

who brought them through
and to their future grandchildren and great grandchildren
who will learn from this book what their family survived.

This is the dedication from the transcript of a series of interviews with members of my mother's family conducted and recorded by Ardyth Bradley, one of their American sponsors. The book contains the story of my mother's family's life under the Khmer Rouge, and their eventual escape to the US.



When I first read *A Cambodian Story*, I read this dedication several times, and felt the warmth of tears behind my eyes. I've never seen a picture of my grandfather, Lor Pao, because all photographs of him were destroyed back in Cambodia. I've only been told a very basic outline of his significance in my life and the life of my family, along with snippets of information about his personality and his life.

He was a very smart, dignified, busy man. He never rested-- he worked for the government as an engineer, he led a crew of people digging wells in rural villages, he grew flowers, raised pigs and ducks, and ran a small shop for extra income. When the Khmer Rouge invaded their home city of Battambang, Pao was able to hide his identity as a government employee and educated person, and pose as a farmer to avoid death.

He was not, however, able to avoid a fateful blow to the head by a Khmer Rouge soldier when he was caught stealing oranges for his family of eight. This injury caused permanent damage to his brain, making him quick to anger, changing his speech, and eventually causing his death in 1979, twelve days after successfully getting his family to a border camp in Mairut, Thailand, and starting the process to gain asylum in France. His death changed the course of my family history, causing them to go to the United States, where my grandmother had family, instead.



oh, I didn't know what to say, like I couldn't do anything. What should I do in the middle of knowing nothing? Everyone didn't know what to do.

I didn't think he was going to die yet at that time. About 2 hours after that I knew it. He couldn't talk, only breathing real loud. And I knew he was not going to stay alive any more.

And I couldn't cry at all. My chest just felt almost as if I couldn't breathe. And I didn't talk at all. I was very, very worried, because where would we go and what was I going to do? I didn't know anything. I didn't know French, I didn't know English.

We just sat down and watched him. And I didn't cry. I didn't know what to say. The small children stayed with me. It seemed like I didn't know why I was still alive. It seemed like I was dying too. I couldn't think anything right.

Excerpts from A Cambodian Story: Death and Survival under Pol Pot. My grandmother, Mak Chhoeruk (above), and my oldest aunt, Lor Kim Chheng (right and below), recounting Lor Pao's death.

Kim Chheng (18-year-old woman):

Then he just passed out, and people came. My mom was just yelling, and people came and rubbed him. They put him down on the floor. My uncle was biting his heel to make him scream. And I squeezed his head and pulled his hair. He would speak in French, just say a couple of words--"It hurts, it hurts, it hurts."

And then after that he was just gone again. He made a sound like he was snoring. He breathed from the mouth, like snores, really loud, all day.

said, "What?" He was still breathing so strong you would think he was getting better. But no. After that strong breathing he just stopped. And I sat there and watched as he stopped breathing. I screamed, crying, holding on to his leg, his body.

Right: My mother, Chenda Lor at 5 years old at a transit camp in Thailand. Each of the members of the family who made the trip from Cambodia to the US have one, and they all keep them in these small silver frames in their homes.



Left: Five out of seven of the Lor children in front of their house in Mundelein, Illinois, shortly after arriving in the US. From left to right they are: Chenda (my mother), Socheata, Sopha, Sotha, and the toddler is Solay. Missing are the two oldest, Kim Chheng, and Sopheap.

Right: This is everyone! From left to right on top are Chanthy Chut, Kim Chheng Lor, Darith and Davi Chut (Kim Chheng and Chanthy's children), Chhoeruk Mak (my grandma), Sopheap Lor, and Cousin Chanra (Chhoeruk's sister's son). Bottom row: Sopha Lor, Socheata Lor, Sotha Lor, and Chenda Lor (my mom).





A history of fruit trees without fruit

My grandfather stole oranges for his hungry family and
a Khmer Rouge clubbed his head
but he kept living and leading his family of eight
and he didn't stop hustling until twelve days
after his family was safe in a camp in Thailand when he died
and he never got to see his nine american grandchildren
and his five american great-grandchildren
whose lives he made possible
in his life and his death equally.

My mother was five when her father died
but she plants things like he did
and picks fruit from branches hanging over the sidewalk
She's planted fruit trees in ten different yards of ours
but my dad made us move every two years
and she never got to see their trunks get thick
or their roots grow deep
and she never got to pick their fruit.



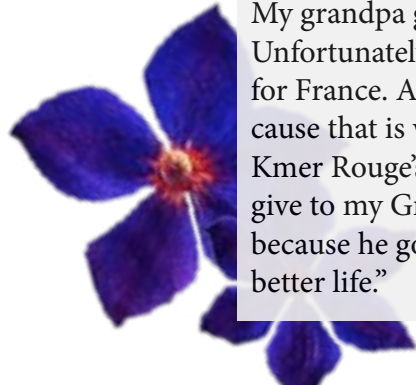
The following are unedited excerpts from blog posts my siblings and I wrote about our visit to Cambodia:



“When we got to Siem Reap the visa people let us all in for free because we are part Cambodian except for daddy because he is white. It took a while because they asked for a marriage certificate for some reason and daddy had to get out his laptop to show them and everything. It was worth it though because we only had to pay \$20 total to get in, and now we all (except daddy) can come back whenever we want.

It was really cool and you could tell mommy was really happy because she was being really weird and laughing a lot, which is not normal. I really like Cambodia, especially all the orange everywhere which is really pretty. Even the dirt is orange sometimes and it covers all the plants near the road with orange dust so everything is orange! I didn't think I liked orange that much but it is actually really pretty.”

Mia Rolph, 14
(1/8/2012, Siem Reap)



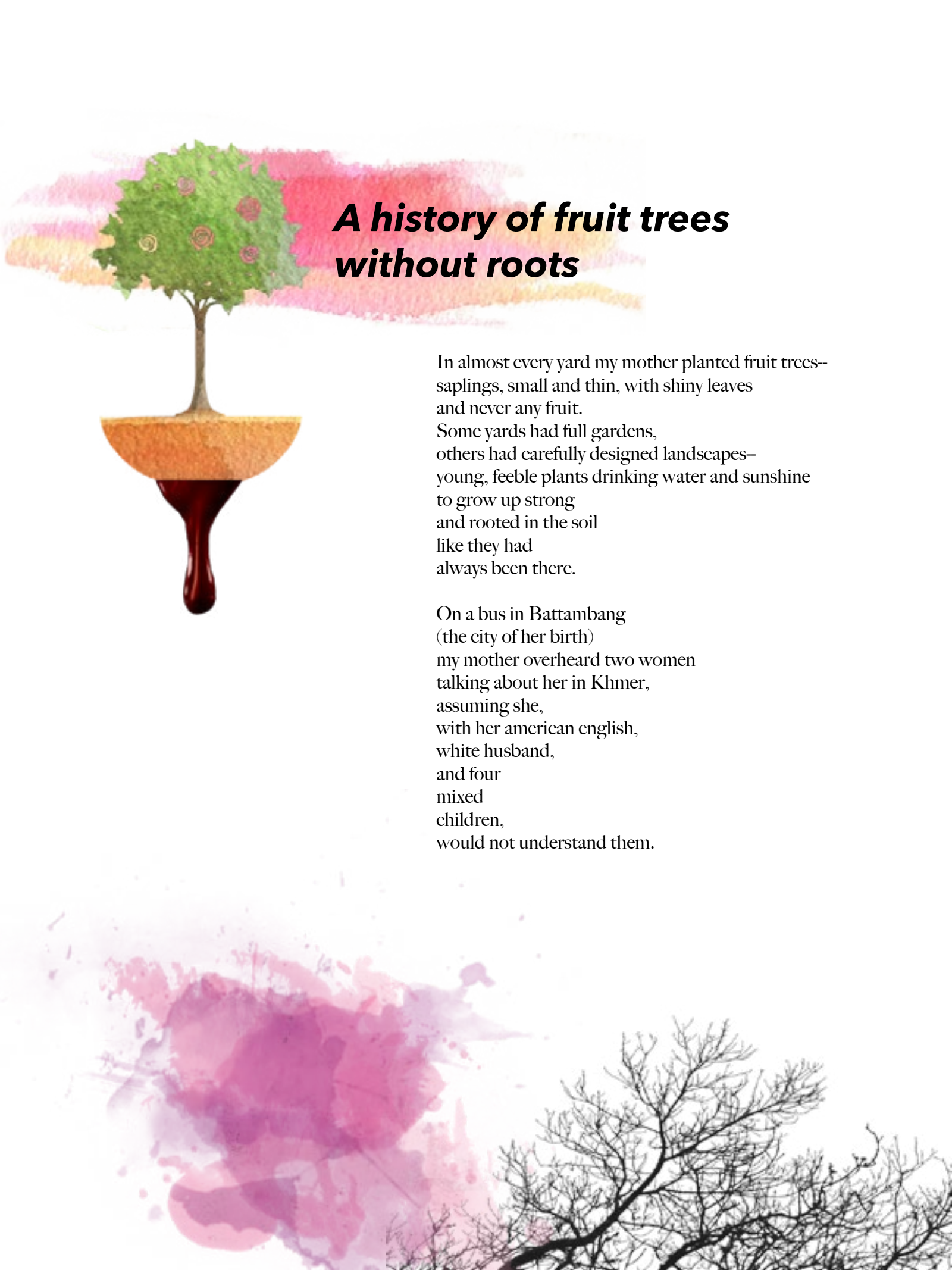
“It was really sick that people could do all this stuff and could live with them self. My family that lived in Cambodia lived through it. My Grandpa, was educated. He fooled that Kmer Rouge into thinking that he was not educated, so he didn't have to go to the camps. But some of my more extended family didn't get so lucky and they were killed. My family had to work really hard and didn't get fed very much. My mom's family ran away to Thailand 3 times before they were let into the refugee camp. My grandpa got 7 kids, a nephew, son-in-law, and his wife to safety, pretty amazing! Unfortunately, he died of a stroke a month before my mom's family was due to leave for France. After he died my Grandma swiched their destinatination to the US because that is where her side of the family went. The stroke was a result of one of the Kmer Rouge's soldiers hit him with a club when he took some fruit off the ground to give to my Grandma back at the concentration camp. I am really gratefully of him, because he got my mom and her family to the refugee camp and helped them get a better life.”

Alexander Rolph, 13
(1/8/2012, Phnom Penh)

“On the tuktuk ride home, daddy told us that we hade just seen one of the wonders of the world. I had no idea what so ever that Ankgor Wat was the biggest religious building in the world. I was really surprised because i thought that religious building could be bigger than that and I never thought Cambodia would have one of the wonders of the world in it.”

Kayley Rolph, 10
(1/13/2012 Siem Reap)





A history of fruit trees without roots

In almost every yard my mother planted fruit trees—
saplings, small and thin, with shiny leaves
and never any fruit.
Some yards had full gardens,
others had carefully designed landscapes—
young, feeble plants drinking water and sunshine
to grow up strong
and rooted in the soil
like they had
always been there.

On a bus in Battambang
(the city of her birth)
my mother overheard two women
talking about her in Khmer,
assuming she,
with her american english,
white husband,
and four
mixed
children,
would not understand them.

A collection of clear water droplets of various sizes and three vibrant green maple leaves are scattered across the top of the page, framing the title.

FAMILY ECOLOGY

A solid black silhouette of a tree trunk with a few branches extending upwards, positioned behind the first stanza of text.

Trees need their branches
branches need their leaves
and a solid trunk
Trees need their roots
to run deep

A cluster of four yellow autumn leaves with some brown spots, located to the left of the second stanza of text.

Someone is
always cutting wood:
hacking at roots,
breaking off branches,
sawing through trunks
making trees into stumps
then removing the stumps

Each branch broken
off from the trunk
and tied together
in a bundle
of thirsty sticks
with no
roots



VIOLENCE

My body is unreal
Made of uncommon flesh
A product of violence
in the kitchen of each new house
with a stoneware bowl
Smashing against the wall
or against my MOTHER's
Face

(as four pairs of ears
Listened,
and four pairs of eyes
Stared at the ceiling
And four small fists
Clenched)

Many lives are dependant on
Stolen oranges
A blow to the head
survival, starvation, escape,
Twelve days, a fever, a stroke,
And a too-thin body
in an unmarked grave
in Thailand

(they wrapped him in a sheet of plastic
Burned incense, and left him food for passage
And then went to Illinois instead of Paris
So what now *is* could be)

IN WHICH I HAVE RE-
GRETTS THAT AREN'T
MINE TO HAVE

HELP A DEPPRESSED PERSON DEAL
WITH THINKING ABOUT HOW HER LIFE
COULD HAVE EASILY NOT HAPPENED
HAD ANOTHER'S LIFE CONTINUED

HOW CAN I BE GRATEFUL FOR BEING
BORN WHEN I KNOW THAT MY MOTH-
ER COULD HAVE MARRIED A FRENCH-
MAN AND MAYBE HE WOULDN'T HAVE
HIT HER AND HIT HER UNTIL SHE AL-
MOST DISAPPEARED?

MY MOTHER THINKS MY SIBLINGS AND
I WERE WORTH NINETEEN YEARS OF
SLOWLIY BEING ERASED BUT REALLY--

CAN YOU MISS SOMETHING YOU
NEVER HAD?



The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The *mestiza's* dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness.

In a constant state of mental nepantlism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?

El choque de un alma atrapado entre el mundo de espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la deja entullado. Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of spirit, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the world differently. Like others, we communicate. Like others, we have a culture.

Like others, we get multiple, often opposing, views of the world. The together of two self-consistent but conflicting frames of reference³ causes *un choque*.

Within us and within *la cultura*, the dominant beliefs of the white culture attack come from the Mexican culture, and both attack come from the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and a challenge to the counterstance.

But it is not enough to stand on one's feet, shouting questions, challenging patriarchy. A counterstance locks one into a dualism: one is either oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the *mestiza*, both are reduced to a common denominator. A counterstance refutes the dominant culture, and, for this, it is proudly defiant. All resistance is dependent on, what it is reacting against. A counterstance stems from a problem with another. A counterstance is inner—it's a step towards liberation. But it is not a way of life. At some point, we will have to leave the dualism between the two mortal combatants.

Tenderness, a sign of vulnerability, is not showered on women with verbal abuse. Men, more than women, are fettered to gender. Women at least have had the guts to break out of bondage. Only gay men have

Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.

But it is not a way of life. At some point, we will have to leave the dualism between the two mortal combatants.

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Dear Mom and dad,

Tear me in half
And let my blood
Soak
back into
Mother Earth
it doesn't matter
where

Un-make me

Because I am every woman's sister or lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-



TEN WAYS TO LOVE YOURSELF WHEN YOU WISH YOU WERE NEVER BORN

- 
1. LISTEN TO YOUR MOTHER WHEN SHE TELLS YOU SHE LOVES YOU AND NOTE ALL THE WAYS SHE DOES IT
 2. CRY ON THE PHONE WITH HER UNTIL YOU GET TEARS UP YOUR NOSE
 3. TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS UNTIL 4 AM INSTEAD OF GOING TO SLEEP
 4. TAKE YOUR MEDS DAILY
 5. SIT OUTSIDE WITH THE MOON AND LOOK AT EAST HARLEM AND BREATHE DEEPLY
 6. DON'T ANSWER YOUR DAD'S TEXTS, FORGET HE EXISTS
 7. LET YOURSELF BE ANGRY
 8. KISS WOMEN, BUY YOUR FRIENDS FLOWERS, WASH YOUR FACE EVERY NIGHT
 9. VISIT YOUR FAMILY AND SEE YOUR MOM SMILE AND FEEL THE RELIEF OF YOUR FATHER'S ABSENCE
 10. REMEMBER YOUR GRANDMOTHER WHISPERING "TAKE CARE OF YOUR MOM" INTO YOUR EAR AS SHE HUGGED YOU GOODBYE LAST WINTER



PART

TWO

TO STUDY THE

STORIES



LOUISA

it is a gradual letting go. Libido is detached bit by bit so that, eventually, the mourner is able to declare the object dead and to invest in new objects. In Freud's initial definition of the concept, melancholia is pathological precisely because it is a mourning without 1. Interminable grief resolve the conflict ambivalences that the loss of a loved object or ideal erects. In other words, the melancholic cannot "get over" this loss, cannot work c

to the extent that ideals of whiteness for Asian Americans (as well as people of color) remain unattainable, processes of assimilation are suspended in conflict

concept of assimilation within a melancholic framework. Put otherwise, mourning describes a finite process that might be reasonably aligned with popular American myth of immigration, assimilation, and the melting pot for dominant white ethnic groups. In contrast, melancholia delineates

an unstable and suspended assimilation of Asian Americans into the national fabric. This suspended assimilation—this inability to blend into the "melting pot of America"—suggests that, for Asian Americans, ideals of whiteness are, at best, estranged.

lost ← configuring assimilation and melancholia in this particular manner is important to challenge Freud's contention that melancholia ensues from a "pathological disposition"—that it emerges from the disturbance of individual person psychology rather than the disruption of an intersubjective relationship. In our model, the inability to "get over" the lost ideal of white

the daughters' bodies and voices become substitutes for those of the mothers

clash between parents and children. Additionally, these SGCA's are also im-

trauma of their parent's experience in

aftermath of the holocaust (Lev-Wiesel)

not just the mothers' bodies and voices

second-generation
Cambodian-American

This dissertation intends to explore

Rouge on SGCA. Using a quantitative statistical

theory, this research addresses the following

the hypotheses that this study will explore.

This turning from outside to inside threatens to erase the political bases of melancholia. When Asian American students seek therapy, for example, their mental health issues—overwhelmingly perceived as intergenerational familial conflicts—are often diagnosed as being exclusively symptomatic of cultural (not political) conflicts. That is, by configuring Asian cultural difference as the source of all intergenerational dis-ease, Asian culture comes to serve as an alibi or a scapegoat for a panoply of mental health issues. These issues may, in fact, trace their etiology not to questions of Asian cultural difference but rather to forms of institutionalized racism and economic exploitation. The segregation of Asian American health issues into

the domain of cultural difference thus covers over the need to investigate structural questions of social inequity as they circulate both inside and outside the therapeutic space of the clinic. For instance, not to recognize the history of Japanese internment when analyzing Tajiri's mother-daughter relationship serves not only to repress and to deny this history but also to redouble and to intensify the source of the daughter's melancholia. Lisa Lowe writes in *Immigrant Acts*:

Interpreting Asian American culture exclusively in terms of the master narratives of generational conflict and filial relation essentializes Asian American culture, obscuring the particularities and incommensurabilities of class, gender, and national diversities among Asians. The reduction of the cultural politics of racialized ethnic groups, like Asian Americans, to first-generation/second-generation struggles displaces social differences into a privatized familial opposition. Such reductions contribute to the aestheticizing commodification of Asian American cultural differences, while denying the immigrant histories of material exclusion and differentiation."

A therapeutic process that solely attributes cultural differences to intergenerational conflict may not only result in the failure to cure; it may also serve to endanger further the mental health of the Asian American patient.

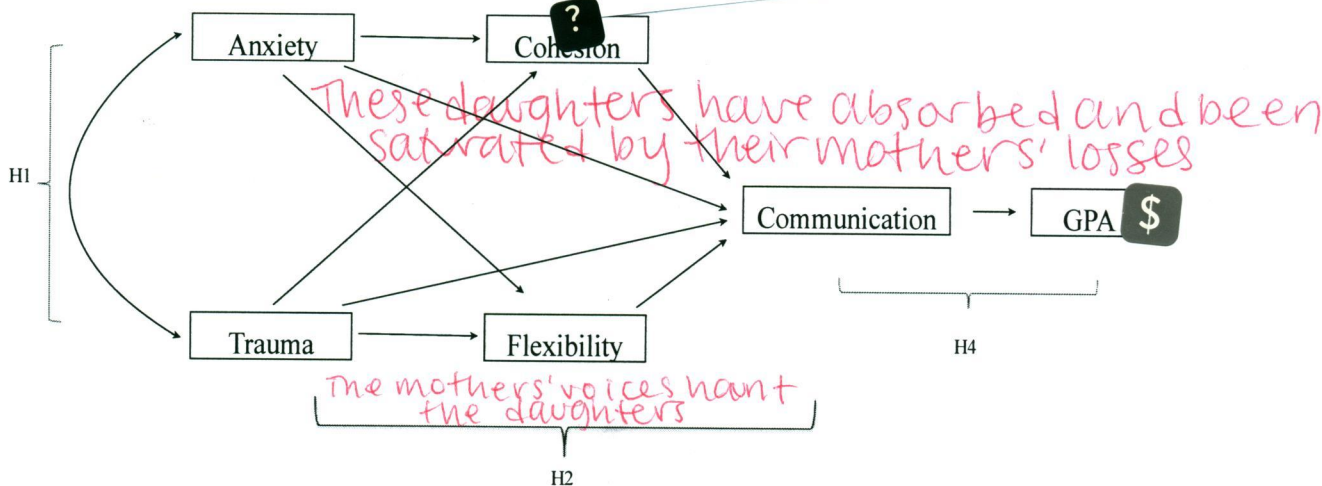


Figure 1. Initial Path Model

Based on the current literature on intergenerational trauma, this model assumes

that there is a great likelihood that SGCA experience intergenerational trauma symptoms

and anxiety due to their parent's experience in the Khmer Rouge. Therefore, the first

The anger that these daughters feel toward the loved object is internalized as depression.

BOCHAN HUY "Chnam Oun 16"



Bochan - Chnam Oun 16



[Khmer]

They tried to stop us (they tried they tried)
They tried to rob us (they tried they tried)
Makin [Khmer] I survived, we survived

[Khmer] (say what?) la la la la la la la

Can I love you, can I love you
Hold, kiss, touch, hug you
Was you listenin the whistle when I was singin our sonnet
It's new for you, It's new for me
Our imagery is chemistry
And could it be a travesty if you and me would never be

Heart is spittin listen closer
Forget the world and live your life like you supposed ta
We could be that love movie poster, see the view
But first things first t-t-t-tell me who are you?

I am a crying woman
Rising from [Khmer]
They try to stop us
They try to rob us
Like a [Khmer] I survived, we survived

I am a crying woman
I am a crying woman
They try to stop us (they tried they tried)
They try to rob us (they tried they tried)
Like a [Khmer] I survived I survived (we survived, ya'll)

[Khmer]
(ahaha, c'mon)

la la la la la la la x 5

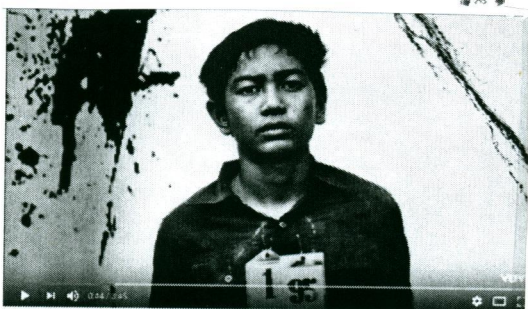
[Khmer]



Bochan - Chnam Oun 16



25,175 vie



Bochan - Chnam Oun 16



25,175 view



Bochan - Chnam Oun 16



25,175 view

"I wanted to shock [listeners] a little bit," says the 34-year-old Oakland, Calif., musician. She says she hoped to spark dialogue in a community where conversations about Cambodia's genocidal and refugee experiences are still muted by pain. But works like "Chnam Oun 16," she says, also attempt to make that history tangible in a country where Cambodia's plight remains largely foreign-folded into America's history lessons as a footnote of the Vietnam war.

There have been messages of solidarity in that effort, Huy says, but also accusations of cultural destruction: talk of using genocide images without sensitivity, and concerns about her dress and musical influences that disrupt the original psych rock sound. Some ask whether Huy is right to pluck pieces of her heritage—both its darkest moments and most cherished artifacts—and fit them into works that are "not Cambodian."

all countries are mine because
I am every woman's
sister and potential
lover.

all



BORDER

LIMIT

BOUNDARY-BOUND

EDGE-DIVIDE

THRESHOLD-POSSIBILITY-FREEDOM

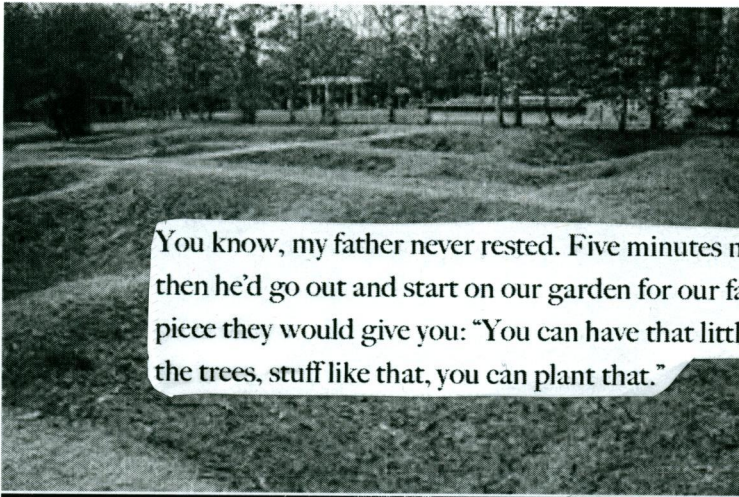
LIMINALITY-CHANGE

?

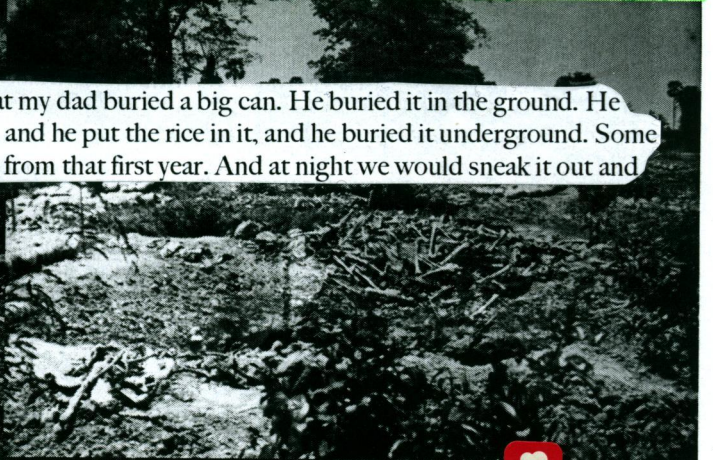
WHAT COLLECTIVELY
DOES THE DAUGHTER
OF THE DARKSKIN
MOTHER DO?



- GLORIA ANZALDÚA



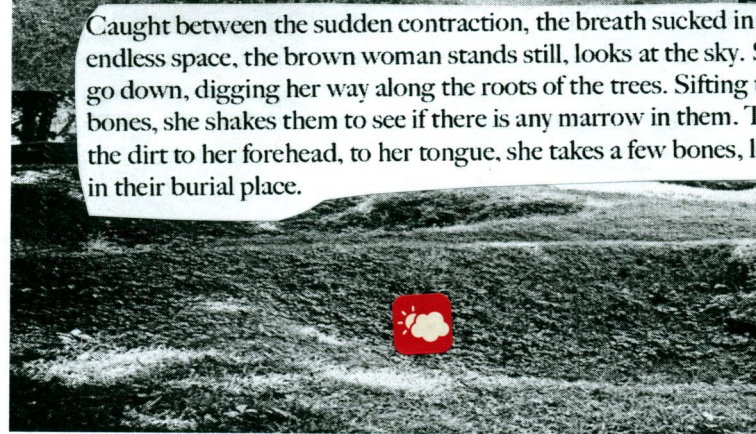
You know, my father never rested. Five minutes maybe, and then he'd go out and start on our garden for our family. A little piece they would give you: "You can have that little hill. Cut up the trees, stuff like that, you can plant that."



I remember that my dad buried a big can. He buried it in the ground. He made this hole, and he put the rice in it, and he buried it underground. Some rice we had left from that first year. And at night we would sneak it out and cook it.



Caught between the sudden contraction, the breath sucked in and the endless space, the brown woman stands still, looks at the sky. She decides to go down, digging her way along the roots of the trees. Sifting through the bones, she shakes them to see if there is any marrow in them. Then, touching the dirt to her forehead, to her tongue, she takes a few bones, leaves the rest in their burial place.



We are the *chile colorado*,
the green shoot that cracks the rock.
We will abide.

